

Space shuttle's final trip is an all-night affair (Update)

October 14 2012, by Alicia Chang



The space shuttle Endeavour is slowly moved down Crenshaw Blvd., Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012, in Los Angeles. The shuttle is on its last mission—a 12-mile creep through city streets. It will move past an eclectic mix of strip malls, mom-and-pop shops, tidy lawns and faded apartment buildings. Its final destination: California Science Center in South Los Angeles where it will be put on display. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

(AP)—In thousands of Earth orbits, the space shuttle Endeavour traveled

123 million miles (198 million kilometers). But the last few miles (kilometers) of its final journey are proving hard to get through.

Endeavour's 12-mile (19-kilometer) crawl across Los Angeles to the California Science Museum hit repeated delays Saturday, leaving expectant crowds along city streets and at the destination slowly dwindling. Officials estimated the shuttle, originally expected to finish the trip early Saturday evening, would not arrive until mid-morning Sunday.

At times on Saturday it seemed the only thing moving was the shuttle's fast-changing estimated time of arrival.

The day started off promising, with Endeavour 90 minutes ahead of schedule. But accumulated hurdles and hiccups caused it to run hours behind at day's end.



Spectators take pictures as the space shuttle Endeavour makes its way down Crenshaw Boulevard in Los Angeles, Calif. on Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012 to the California Science Center museum. (AP Photo/Patrick T. Fallon)

The problems included longer than expected maintenance of the rig carrying the shuttle and physical obstacles within the shuttle's wingspan, including light posts, building edges, and, most of all, trees.

In a scene that repeated itself many times, a small tree on the narrowest section of the move brought the procession to a stop, forcing crews to find creative ways to dip a wing under or raise it over the tree without having to cut the tree down.



The space shuttle Endeavour is moved to the California Science Center in Los Angeles on Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012. (AP Photo/Lucy Nicholson, Pool)

Some 400 trees had been removed to avoid such situations, but officials said most of the trees that gave them trouble could not be cut down because they were old or treasured for other reasons, including some planted in honor of civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

Still, the mood for most of the day was festive.

At every turn of Endeavour's stop-and-go commute through the working class streets of southern Los Angeles, a constellation of spectators trailed along as the space shuttle ploddingly nosed past stores, schools, churches and front yards.



The space shuttle Endeavour is slowly moved down Crenshaw Blvd. at Slauson Ave., Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012, in Los Angeles. The shuttle is on its last mission—a 12-mile creep through city streets. It will move past an eclectic mix of strip malls, mom-and-pop shops, tidy lawns and faded apartment buildings. Its final destination: California Science Center in South Los Angeles where it will be put on display. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

Thousands marveled at the engineering. Some rooted for Endeavour when it appeared it might clip a light post.

"This is great for the city as a whole. It makes us proud," said Dean Martinez, a project director for a nonprofit who began waiting before dawn to see the space shuttle.

Unlike other high-profile events such as the Academy Awards or the Rose Parade, the procession was centered in some of the area's most economically troubled places. The shuttle passed shuttered businesses and rolled down many streets that were aflame two decades earlier during the 1992 riots brought on by the Rodney King beating.

Endeavour hit the pavement before dawn Friday, trundling out of the Los Angeles International Airport on a remote-controlled 160-wheel carrier past diamond-shaped "Shuttle Xing" signs. When it reached a freeway overpass that night, it was towed by a truck.



A boy holds a model of the space shuttle Endeavour near the shuttle as it is moved to the California Science Center in Los Angeles on Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012. (AP Photo/Lucy Nicholson, Pool)

The shuttle made a late-morning pit stop Saturday at the Forum—former home of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team—where it was greeted in the arena's parking lot by a throng of cheering spectators. It was late to its second public celebration, which included a dance performance choreographed by Debbie Allen.

Before the move, some area residents lamented over the loss of shade as trees were chopped down. Others thought it was a decent trade.



The space shuttle Endeavour travels past a fast food restaurant along on Crenshaw Blvd. enroute to the California Science Center during its final journey

in Los Angeles, Calif. on Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012. (AP Photo/Jeff Gritchen, Pool)

"If you have to go through a little bit of pain to have something nice for the community, then it's worth it," said Pamela Tucker, who lives a block away from Crenshaw Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Endeavour may have circled the globe nearly 4,700 times, but its roots are grounded in California. Its main engines were fabricated in the San Fernando Valley. The heat tiles were invented in Silicon Valley. Its "fly-by-wire" technology was developed in the Los Angeles suburb of Downey.



Roni Lopez, center, holds an American flag as the space shuttle Endeavour slowly moves along city streets on a 160-wheeled carrier in Los Angeles, Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012 toward its retirement home at a museum. (AP Photo/Jae

C. Hong)

It's no longer shiny and sleek, like when it first rolled off the assembly line in the Mojave Desert in 1991 to replace Challenger, which exploded during liftoff in 1986, killing seven astronauts. As it cruised block-by-block, it's hard to miss what millions of miles in space and two dozen re-entries can do to the exterior.

Shuffling Endeavour through city streets was a laborious undertaking—nearly a year in the making. It could not be taken apart without damaging the delicate tiles. Airlifting it was out of the question. So was driving on freeways since it was too massive to fit through underpasses.



Roni Lopez, center, holds an American flag as the Space Shuttle Endeavour slowly moves along city streets on a 160-wheeled carrier in Los Angeles,

Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012 towards the California Science Center museum. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

Such a move is not cheap. The cross-town transport was estimated at \$10 million, to be paid for by the science center and private donations.

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